

## THE BUILDING OF AN INDIGENOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN AFRICA

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The present economic crisis and the resulting greatly reduced funds for the missionary enterprise compel us to give much time to the study of our whole mission program and our methods. Our mission work dare not stop or the home church will die. Our only salvation is to change our methods.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to show how we can continue our mission work with much smaller funds, and second, to indicate that our Christian communities will be better off and more self-supporting in the future if the mission is operated on considerably less money. We have loaded up our whole mission program with much excess baggage of western custom, culture, method, and "things," until now we do not have enough money to tip the porters.

We who are missionaries have known what the word "indigenous" means and have been desirous of establishing indigenous Christian communities. But we have not given thought and study as to how to apply the idea in our missionary methods in every way, hence we have badly missed the mark. We have not looked ahead twenty or thirty years to see how the results of our every day mission methods are going to affect the life of the people in the future.

This paper is not a personal criticism of any Board, Mission or individual. I am writing as a missionary on furlough and I am criticising no one any more than I do myself. I write hoping there may be helpful, constructive criticism for all of us.

One of the greatest drawbacks is the unfortunate missionary complex which we allow ourselves to develop, thinking our culture, customs, arts and crafts are superior and the natives' inferior and therefore to be replaced with ours. By so doing we suppress and crush out the indigenous instincts, life springs, and natural modes of expression, instead of encouraging them and helping the people develop their own. In this respect many of our methods have been fundamentally wrong.

Missionary adaptation is not merely adjusting one's self to climate and new conditions for his own comfort. That is a very small part of it. But rather missionary adaptation is that ability to throw away one's own ways and means of doing things—customs, habits, manners of expression—and guiding the natives in cultivating, developing and improving their own arts, crafts, customs, music and folklore. What the African missions of today need much more than additional money is more of the genius of adaptability.

In the average mission on the African field too much of the total working time of the missionary staff is taken up in ordering foreign goods, supplies and equipment, arranging for their transportation and paying the bills along the route by mail and hiring native laborers to transport them inland. All this requires continuous secretarial and bookkeeping work and the goods cost the mission more than twice the purchase price at home. This work cannot be eliminated but it can be cut in two if we would put our mission work on an indigenous basis instead of trying to transplant our American institutional methods which are so foreign to them. The major part of the total time and energy of the missionary staff is spent in setting up and providing the buildings and equipment for our mission institutions. Much of it is so complex and all so expensive that the natives cannot now or ever hope to follow in the same methods should all foreign money and staff be withdrawn. Every machine, apparatus or device that is taken to the field takes that much more of the missionaries' time to operate it and keep it in repair and ordering supplies and repairs for them until so often they hinder more than they help true mission work.

In contrast to the African surroundings the average mission station is a capitalistic set up of the first magnitude. When we think of Christ and his teachings on the simple life, we are made to ask ourselves, "Is this a plan he would follow?" Of course in mode of life the missionary family cannot live native, but needs a house. However this house should be simple yet large enough to meet the needs and built to protect the family from the weather and mosquitoes.

In our methods of teaching and training we must face about. The fact that some mission stations are now crying out because we must close our institutions is proof enough that they have not been built up on a self-supporting indigenous plan.

It is impossible in this short paper to explain how to carry out all the details of missionary activity, but let us look at a few examples which illustrate the indigenous methods instead of the foreign superimposed method. In regard to our schools we can learn from the Mohammedans. In Northern Nigeria alone there are 30,000 Mohammedan schools where the boys learn to read and write the Arabic script and it is done entirely without foreign support or supplies.

Let us suppose this situation: a man and his wife have opened a new station and they have spent their first year in intensive study of the language, customs, folklore, thought life and religious practices and beliefs. They sat by the hour in the native compounds and under their shade trees in order to become acquainted, to understand their way of thinking, to discover their beliefs and to feel their moods. They need not order any school supplies, set a day, invite the children to come and start a school in a formal way, for they have been having informal school under the village tree for a long time. They began with the natural informal method which the American educators are trying to bring back in America. They have been teaching the



group which gathers around each day to write on the ground or sand with stems of grass. Then the missionary may show them how to make their own blackboards using the same material they use to cement their dye pits and putting it on the ground, trees, or walls of huts. Next they may make crayons of white clay, or use charcoal. One of the first projects would be to have the community build an ideal compound. The compound would not be on the mission compound but in the village and for the chief. Another project would be to build up a native blacksmith shop and let each older boy make his own chisel, and with a stick with a knot on it for a mallet, they could fit together round sticks into holes and make rustic furniture, Kongo beds, etc. All that each boy makes is to be his own property. The mission would be putting in nothing foreign and taking nothing out. Soon the people will see the need of a school building and want it. The missionary could supervise the building of it in the village rather than on the mission compound and the whole community would take much more interest in it because they would realize it was their own building, and not belonging to the white man. This would not be forced labor, because the people wanted their own building. By creating the desire first, they would do it, instead of building an institution with foreign money and then trying to create the desire for its use after it was up. The point is that it can be done without money--necessity being the mother of invention on the mission field. But our weakness as missionaries is always to do the easiest thing the quick way, that of ordering foreign supplies and doing things the way we have always done them, instead of doing the slower and more difficult thing, that of developing the native indigenous materials and making their institutions self-supporting.

The test of whether or not the missionary's method is indigenous is: can the boy you have taught equip himself to do the thing he has been taught and will he do it for himself and his own people. The industrial education by government and missions has been to teach the natives how to make things the foreigners want for themselves, and after the boys have learned the craft, they are educated away from native agricultural life and become dependent entirely upon European employment for existence.

Missions have held literacy to be the main objective of education in Africa. Miss Carney gives the following seven objectives for African education and in this order: health, character development, home betterment, citizenship, cultural development, literacy and economics. The curriculum should be much broader than just teaching them to read. This is necessary in order that they may read the Gospel story, but this alone is not enough; it educates away from the soil and self-support and makes them dependent upon the mission for positions as teachers or evangelists.

One of the most expensive departments of missionary activity is the medical mission work and I would be the last one to suggest that we try to carry on missionary activities without the medical side of the work. But the problem confronting many missions is in what proportion the medical program should be expanded in relation to the educational and evangelistic work of the missions. With a good doctor the medical activities grow rapidly and expand over a large territory. Is the mission justified in maintaining such a large medical program when it is impossible to follow it up with educational and evangelistic work to the same individuals and groups who have received physical help? It seems to me too often we let our sympathy for the sick and suffering throw our program out of balance and emphasize too much the healing of the physical body at the expense of developing the eternal values. Some missions have spent thousands of pounds on medical buildings, equipment, foreign medicines, and support of staff for ten to twenty years and within a stone's throw of the medical compound natives are living in exactly the same unsanitary conditions that prevailed before the mission station was opened. Does it pay to pluck forever the fruits of unsanitary conditions and disease and do nothing toward their prevention?

Here again the trouble is the failure of the medical missionary to adjust his program to the most far reaching and permanent needs of his locality. He builds up his institutions in like manner and with the same objectives as the one in which he received his training, which was in a country where the state looked after sanitation and the education of the people in sanitary living. His first objective should be to train and educate the natives instead of just to cure them, and in this way multiply himself many fold. The doctor should spend more time in discovering and developing with the natives the use of local herbs and native cures. The government and the mission boards should unite on this kind of medical research in various localities.

Missionaries sometimes boast that they were able to preach their first sermon in eight or ten months after landing on the field. Some feel they must begin preaching as soon as they know the meaning of enough words. This is a sad mistake. Much of the bitter opposition to the Christian message could have been avoided had the missionary first spent much more time in careful study of the thought life and religious concepts and feelings of the people. He should discover the exact meanings of the native religious vocabulary before he uses these words in presenting the Gospel. The standards for new missionaries are too low not only for language requirements but for an accurate knowledge of the thought and religious life of the native people.

When we are working with a man's religion, we are at the very roots of his personality which are often very tender as well as sacred and many ignorant missionaries have jumped in with boldness and haste where angels would have refused to tread.

The missionary's job is to make his job unnecessary, and he must ask himself every day, "Am I doing my work in such a manner that I can withdraw and all that I have done go on in the life of the people?"

We read that the people in India are saying, "We want your Christ but we do not want your western civilization." Let us take this warning to our work in Africa before it is too late, and change our methods now.

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